

May 26, 2026

Jay Bhattacharya, MD, PhD  
Director  
National Institutes of Health  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Bhattacharya:

On behalf of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) Research Advisory Committee, we appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed Framework for the NIH-Wide Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2027–2031 (NOT-OD-26-047).

ASPPH represents 155 accredited schools and programs of public health across the United States and globally. Our member institutions conduct research spanning biomedical discovery, population health, prevention science, implementation research, environmental health, infectious disease preparedness, health systems research, behavioral science, and community-engaged scholarship. We appreciate NIH's leadership in advancing rigorous and impactful science and welcome the agency's effort to establish a strategic framework that will guide the nation's research enterprise over the coming years.

ASPPH Research Committee members, who collectively represent a broad range of institutions, geographic regions, and research priorities, strongly support NIH's proposed focus on foundational science, prevention, workforce sustainability, infrastructure, stewardship, and public trust. We also encourage NIH to further strengthen the framework in several areas that are particularly important to advance the public's health and support the unique contributions of public health research and training.

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## **Prevention and Population Health**

We strongly support the inclusion of disease prevention and health promotion across the lifespan as a core strategic priority. Public health research consistently demonstrates that prevention-oriented investments produce substantial long-term benefits for health outcomes, reduce healthcare costs, national resilience, and quality of life. Preventive public health approaches are most effective when paired with access to routine, evidence-based care and policies that support healthy environments and behaviors across communities.

As NIH finalizes the strategic plan, ASPPH encourages stronger recognition of:

- Application of population health science to chronic disease prevention, healthy aging, and quality of life improvement;
- Research to understand biological, behavioral, social, and structural determinants of population health;
- Implementation science approaches that accelerate the translation of evidence into practice;
- Public health systems and health services research that improve access, delivery, and quality of care;
- Research evaluating the effects of policies and systems on nutrition, physical activity, and population well-being;
- Environmental and climate-related influences on health threats and risk factors; and
- Community-engaged and translational research that supports rapid adoption of evidence-based interventions.

Addressing complex health challenges increasingly requires interdisciplinary and team-based science that integrates biomedical discovery with upstream prevention strategies, data science innovation, and cross-sector public health interventions to improve the health and well-being of all people in the United States.

## **Research Workforce Sustainability**

We appreciate NIH's recognition that sustaining an interdisciplinary research workforce is essential to the future of U.S. science. Schools and programs of public health are deeply concerned about growing instability across the research and training pipeline, particularly for early-stage investigators, interdisciplinary scholars, prevention scientists, health services researchers, and investigators working in community-engaged fields.

We encourage NIH to prioritize long-term workforce development through:

- Support for public health training programs, loan repayment opportunities, and lifelong learning initiatives;
- Interdisciplinary and cross-sector training opportunities;
- Sustainable pathways for early-stage and emerging investigators;
- Training and career development in health services access, delivery, and quality research;
- Support for community-engaged research careers and science communication training; and
- Policies that strengthen institutional stability, mentoring capacity, and collaborative research environments across the health and life sciences.

Public health research often depends on collaborative public-private partnerships involving health departments, community-based organizations, health systems, and other nontraditional research partners. Sustaining these partnerships requires predictable, flexible, and adequately resourced research support structures.

### **Research Infrastructure and Data Systems**

ASPPH supports NIH's emphasis on building and sustaining research infrastructure. Modern public health challenges require robust, interoperable, and secure data systems capable of supporting rapid scientific collaboration, large-scale data integration, disease monitoring, and evidence generation.

We encourage NIH to emphasize and support:

- Modernization of public health data infrastructure;
- Interoperability across research, clinical, and public health systems;
- Data-sharing frameworks that preserve public trust and ethical stewardship;
- Community-accessible research infrastructure and multi-sector collaboration;
- Investments supporting large-scale data science and population health analytics;
- Sustained support for national public health surveillance and preparedness systems.

We also encourage NIH to support responsible and evidence-based applications of artificial intelligence in biomedical and public health research, including opportunities to improve population health insights, prevention strategies, health communication, and clinical-public health integration while carefully addressing ethical, environmental, and equity considerations.

### **Scientific Stewardship and Public Trust**

We support NIH's proposed focus on transparency, accountability, and public trust in science. Public confidence in scientific institutions is foundational to the success of the biomedical and public health research enterprise.

As NIH advances this priority, we encourage continued emphasis on and active support of:

- Scientific integrity and rigorous peer review;
- Transparent and evidence-based decision-making;
- Open and responsible science practices;
- Community engagement and partnership;
- Clear communication regarding research priorities and funding decisions; and
- Training and career development in effective communication of science to the public.

Public trust in the research enterprise is strengthened when scientific processes are transparent, predictable, and inclusive of the communities research is intended to serve. Clear communication regarding programmatic priorities, funding criteria, and decision-making processes will help sustain confidence among investigators, institutions, and the public.

## **Institutional Sustainability and Research Support**

Finally, ASPPH encourages NIH to recognize the importance of sustainable research financing and infrastructure support. Academic public health research frequently involves multi-site, multi-investigator, and community-based partnerships that require stable administrative and operational capacity, including complex contracting, ethics oversight, data-sharing coordination, and long-term partnership development.

Continued uncertainty regarding facilities and administrative cost policies, grant administration expectations, and research support structures may disproportionately affect institutions conducting prevention-oriented and community-engaged research. Transparent communication and early engagement with the research community will be critical to maintaining institutional capacity, workforce stability, and the collaborative infrastructure required to advance public health science.

ASPPH and its member institutions stand ready to work collaboratively with NIH to ensure that the FY27–FY31 Strategic Plan strengthens the nation’s scientific enterprise and advances the health of all communities. We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and welcome continued dialogue as NIH finalizes and implements the strategic plan.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the nation’s research enterprise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniele Fallin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Daniele Fallin, PhD  
Dean, Emory Rollins School of Public Health  
Chair, Research Advisory Committee  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Magaña". The signature is very stylized and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

Laura Magaña, PhD  
President and CEO  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health